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Mr Alan Johnson  
Aldercar High School  
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Dear Mr Johnson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Aldercar High School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and subject leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke on the telephone to the Chair of the Governing Body and to the senior school improvement adviser for Derbyshire local authority. The school action plan and self-evaluation document were evaluated, and I reviewed the school's single central record and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and minutes of the governing body. I made short visits to lessons in English, science and mathematics.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the equivalent of 15 full-time teachers have left the school. Seven of these were part-time posts and three were fixed-term contracts that came to an end. Some of those who left were unqualified teachers. You have appointed an experienced head and deputy head of the mathematics faculty and

made an internal promotion to replace the head of physical education. You appointed the equivalent of 1.6 full-time teachers of technology in January and you are in the process of recruiting the equivalent of 3.5 full-time qualified teachers for September 2016 to replace long-term supply teachers. In addition, a science teacher has left and their work is currently being covered by a supply teacher.

## **Main findings**

You, other leaders and governors have a clearly expressed and coherent vision for the improvement of this school. This vision is known and understood by all, and it drives the difficult decisions you have had to make to ensure that the school improves at the necessary rate. You have kept the interests of pupils at the heart of what you do.

The decisions you have taken are now beginning to bear fruit. For example, you have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that it best meets the needs of pupils and better equips them for further education, employment or training. This has meant discontinuing some subjects and making the necessary staffing adjustments. The impact of these decisions can now be seen in much-improved school finances, and a clearer sense of whole-school priorities.

Your senior leadership team is small, but cohesive. You each have a good understanding of what is needed to be done to raise achievement and of your roles in driving improvement. Despite many other distractions, including an extensive rebuild, you have kept a close focus on the key priorities.

The programme of support for middle leaders is helping these leaders to be more effective in their roles. They are much clearer about their role in improving teaching. They are becoming more skilled in holding teachers in their departments to account for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. They carry out their own learning walks, book scrutinies and formal lesson observations, and ensure that information about teaching and achievement feeds into the programme of training and development. There is now a more robust and more consistent approach to performance management. Teachers are set more challenging targets and these targets are now more closely linked to the whole-school priorities. As a consequence, the high expectations you have of staff are becoming more widely established, and the whole school has a greater clarity of purpose.

Most departments are now fully staffed with permanent, fully qualified teachers, although there is still a small number of long-term supply teachers in place. Teachers and leaders at all levels are becoming more practised in reflecting honestly on their own performance and seeking out the necessary support to improve. Training opportunities, including paired observations and coaching, are helping them to have a better understanding of how to plan learning that best meets the needs of pupils. In some classes, they are hampered by a legacy of poor teaching that has meant that pupils have not developed the skills they need in order to do well. You

have addressed this by introducing a skills matrix across Key Stages 3 and 4, so that underachievement is identified and addressed sooner. You are working more closely with your feeder primary schools so that information about pupils is shared and the correct support put in place. The new tracking system is becoming better understood and used by staff. It enables you to pinpoint exactly which pupils are not on track to achieve their targets, and to ensure that the right support is put in place.

You have focused on the need to ensure that teachers' predictions for pupils' achievement are accurate. You have increased moderation opportunities within departments, and included accurate prediction as a performance management target for all staff. While you have made progress in this area, this rightly remains a key focus.

Efforts to improve marking and feedback are paying dividends. Pupils I spoke with in lessons knew what they had to do to improve their work, as a result of the detailed feedback they receive from teachers on their work. You have ensured that this is manageable for teachers, in wisely not insisting that every piece of work is marked in the same, detailed way.

More stable teaching in a number of subjects has led to improved outcomes for pupils in 2015. In other subjects, notably English, pupils' achievement was not as expected, due in some part to the inaccuracy of teachers' predictions and a legacy of underachievement by some pupils. However, the results also reflected the fact that teaching was not consistently good across all subjects. There are some encouraging signs, however, in the number of departments where pupils achieve consistently well, and in the better rates of progress being made by younger pupils. In the sixth form, you have seen an increasing proportion continue into higher education, including to Russell Group universities.

You have done much to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Despite an intensive building programme and the inevitable disruption this brings, pupils' conduct around the school and in lessons is exemplary. They are polite and friendly, keen to improve their own work and to help each other. In the lessons we visited, they displayed positive attitudes to learning and relationships with teachers appeared good. You are continuing to work to ensure that their attendance improves and that fixed-term exclusions reduce. The move to vertical tutoring and the new house system have brought a new sense of coherence and unity to the school.

The new well-being programme has been positively welcomed by staff and pupils. The emphasis on character education focuses on developing the right skills, attitudes and values needed to become successful learners and play a full role in civic life. Although it is too soon to judge the impact of this work, staff are excited and motivated by this new development.

Governors continue to provide the necessary support and challenge, and are effective in holding leaders to account. They have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and ensure that a focus is kept on the performance of different groups.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided targeted support to the English and information and communication technology departments, and to you as headteacher; you told me how much you have valued this support. The local authority's regular monitoring visits ensure that it is kept well informed of the school's progress, and that the school is focused on the right priorities for improvement. The support it has provided for middle leaders is helping to ensure that these leaders are becoming more effective in their roles.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**